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Pay Inequality and Gender Pay Gap

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the
Weissman School of Arts and Science

Baruch College, The City University of New York

In partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In

CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

By

Chris G Constantopoulos

Graduate Student's Name

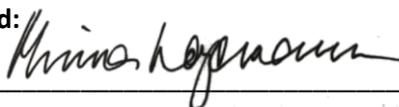
December 15, 2021

Date

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approved by all its members, this project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Corporate Communication.

This project also has been presented at colloquium to departmental colleagues and faculty.

Approved:



Professor _____, Advisor

Date: 12/15/2021



Professor _____, Reader

Date: 12/15/2021



Professor _____, Program Director

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November 29, 2021

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Constantopoulos, Chris. *Pay Inequality and Gender Pay Gap in America*. Master of Arts,
Corporate Communication, December 2021, CUNY Baruch College, New York, NY.

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Abstract

The topic of this thesis paper is pay inequality and gender pay gap, specifically within the United States while occasionally comparing Europe and other parts of the world. The research questions that are brought up while starting this thesis process were how the topic started and developed with the last 10 years. Plus, the potential strides to eliminate the thesis topics issues within the United States. The method of analysis for this thesis paper includes an integrative desktop literature review while analyzing various online and prior academic research articles. The result of studying the numerous amounts of research helped gather three primary resolutions to remove the pay inequality and gender pay gap in the United States. This academic research was only conducted analyzing only male and female genders. Future research should include or attempt to interview and find data regarding the LGBTQ2+ community and those affected such as transgenders, non-binary, etc.

Keywords: Gender Pay Gap, Gender Segregation, Solutions to Pay Gap between Men and Women, United States Gender Pay Gap, Gender and Economic Inequality

Introduction

There was a time, not so long ago, when women were considered too frail or lacking the intelligence needed to work outside the home, except in “womanly” jobs such as maid, cook, nurse, or a teacher of small children. The notion that women could enter the workforce and earn their living just as men do was seen as being against Nature, amongst an imbalance of the natural order of things. As recently as the late 19th century, a Harvard study concluded that typing might be too exhausting for a woman’s delicate structure but regarded “her duty of childbirth” as a more suitable physical task (Kessler-Harris 2014, p. 18).

It took two World Wars to show that women could not only thrive in the workplace, but that society was better off when women did. Just as power and influence remain largely male-dominated, so too is there an unfair imbalance in wages and earnings. With over 100 years of women entering the workforce, despite becoming the majority of U.S. workers at the dawn of the 21st century, women are still underpaid relative to men. The gender pay gap in the United States of America is the topic of this review, an exploration of its factors and impacts to women and society as a whole throughout the country.

A woman enters the workforce and begins her career at an entry-level job. Her male colleague starts at the same job at the same time. Within a few weeks, she notices that he is consulted more often on all aspects of their work, though she is equally adept and even more so in certain key processes. He is invited to meetings outside the level of his authority to be an active participant while she is invited less often, primarily to be a note taker or silent observer.

A year later, she receives a small raise, but he receives a new title, one created to grant him a larger operational scope, though she does the same job just as well. He is telling her about

recruiting offers from other firms, offers she is not receiving. Five years later, despite glowing performance reviews and key project management successes she has undertaken from start to finish, she is working for him. She finds out through the office grapevine that he now makes 15% more than she does, and with benefits she has not been granted, even though their work output actually shows her to be slightly more effective and resourceful than he is.

She marries, and within a year is taking maternity leave. Returning to work, she is effectively demoted to a job level below her skills in order to “catch up” after a 12-week leave. Meanwhile, he is now in senior management, and earning 25% more than she is.

This generic example serves one purpose: to illustrate the reality of the gender pay gap. Despite a small group of objectors with hand-picked data, the gender pay gap is undeniably real, and is costing women an average of at least 18% in total earnings, or as much as 35% on average across career earnings if one factors in race (Bishu et al., 2017). In this study, the perceptions of the gender pay gap are analyzed to identify personal factors on its impact and whether the reality of this inequality is decreasing or increasing.

Gender pay gap is one of the most discussed problems in the context of inequality existing between men and women. This problem exists across different cultures and in different countries, which indicates that this problem is universal and that it requires a complex solution that can be applied in different environments. While scholars and media started to pay more attention to this problem, it is still far from being resolved, even in the developed countries, where women and men are claimed to have equal rights. It should be noted that the situation with the gender pay gap has slightly changed positively in the past 20-30 years. Statistics show that less-educated women are able to reduce the gender pay gap with less-educated men, while more educated women are able to reduce the gender pay gap with more educated men (Blau & Khan,

2007). While the gender pay gap is gradually becoming smaller and smaller, however there is still much to be achieved.

Scholars, economists, and politicians provide different explanations of why the gender pay gap exists. One of the major factors contributing to the gender pay gap is discrimination. Women are facing discrimination for numerous reasons. Men often experience prejudice and biased attitudes towards women and perceive them as not proficient enough compared to men (Blau & Khan, 2007). Certain gender stereotypes are still influencing men, and these stereotypes create huge challenges and barriers for women. Another important reason is the historical context and traditionalism existing in the U.S. society. Women were usually considered housewives, and therefore girls are raised since early childhood to become housewives. Constant social pressure and stereotypes influenced the educational decisions of women (Blau & Khan, 2007; Brynin, 2017). Therefore, the rates of women who finished higher educational establishments are significantly lower compared to men. As a result, women had poorer knowledge and work-related skills, which prevented them from obtaining well-paid jobs.

Another important factor that contributes to the gender pay gap is that women have lower work-related experience compared to men (Blau & Khan, 2007). Women dedicate more time to raising their children and taking care of their family, because of traditional gender roles. Men spend more time working, which allows them to gain rich work-related experience. It is also worth mentioning that women often feel discouraged from developing more and more work-related experiences. They constantly observe discrimination at the workplace and believe that even if they work harder than men every day, they still won't achieve significant success (Blau & Khan, 2007). Hence, the low motivation levels in women caused by a counterproductive

discriminatory working environment prevents women from achieving career growth and professional development.

Apparently, there is a combination of various factors contributing to the gender pay gap. Furthermore, there is a relationship between these factors, hence each woman experiences pressure from different factors at the same time. Addressing all these factors is quite challenging, and it may take decades to change the status quo in the various labor markets.

There is a need for changing the situation associated with the gender pay gap as soon as possible for the equality in diversity benefits for women. First, it will reduce social inequality existing in society, by promoting equal opportunities to women. Second, it will contribute to better economic development and growth of the U.S., as people will be judged based on their skills and not their gender. Women will understand that their efforts will be rewarded fairly, which will increase their motivation to become better professionals, which in turn will result in better organizational performance. By solving the problem of the gender pay gap it will be possible to achieve various positive social outcomes.

The research questions that will be brought up within this thesis paper start by asking how the topic started and developed with the last 10 years. This analysis explores the following issues the history of gender pay gap, the present stages of it, and ways to reduce it to learn more about the origins and current state of the gender pay gap. This is done by reviewing existing scholarly research on the topic in peer reviewed journals, and then utilizing an integrative literature analysis investigating public online writing as well as academic articles. The result of examining the amounts of data helps gather resolutions to remove the pay inequality and gender pay gap in the United States.

Review of Scholarly Research and Theories

The research written on the topic of the gender pay gap focuses on various aspects of the problem. Scholars have provided different conceptualizations of the problem and used various theoretical frameworks to explain why the gender pay gap exists. Therefore, exploring different theories can provide deeper insights into the problem and understanding of potential solutions and strategies that can be used to reduce or even eliminate the gender pay gap between men and women.

One of the most popular theoretical models is the human capital model. This theoretical model states that every individual possesses some form of human capital (Grybaite, 2006). Usually, human capital is represented in the skills and abilities which an individual has. These skills and abilities are developed through the process of education. These skills and abilities are directly related to the amount of payment received by an individual. Certain skills are in more demand than others. Many individuals look for a job that can maximize benefits while minimizing losses. Women often try to find jobs which don't require a huge investment of their human capital, which can be explained by the fact that they have to spend more time while performing their gender-related functions (Grybaite, 2006). Women also withdraw from the labor market when they have children or because of other family-related reasons. So, women may not be interested in long-term education and acquisition of specific skills, which will provide them with significant benefits only in a long-term distance perspective. Gary S. Becker, who has been awarded a Nobel Prize in Economy, stated that women tend to work part-time significantly more compared to men, and have fewer incentives to invest their time and resources in education (Grybaite, 2006, p. 86). Becker explains that the gradual reduction in the gender pay gap that has occurred in recent years can be explained by several factors. Firstly, there is a

decline in family size, and therefore women don't have to spend as much time with families as they used to. There are also growing divorce rates, which also stimulate women to work harder. Finally, there is a rapid expansion of the services sector, where women are predominantly employed. From the point of view of the human capital theory, the reduction in the gender pay gap can be explained by better access to education that women get nowadays (Brynin, 2017). Women are becoming more educated, which increases their value in the labor market. All these factors have contributed to higher earnings for women and their need to invest more time in the development of skills and abilities demanded in the labor market.

While the human capital model focuses on supply and demand of specific skills which people have, it ignores social context, and therefore this theory is often criticized by scholars and theories who research the topic of gender pay gap (Grybaite, 2006). Additionally, the human capital theory doesn't fully explain the differences in wages between men and women. Some studies also show that women are more educated than men on average, however, they earn significantly less (Grybaite, 2006). Therefore, theories related to discrimination are often used to explain factors associated with social context. The discrimination theory proposed by Becker, explains that there are different sources of discrimination that directly influence the earnings of men and women. Employers, customers, co-workers, and other stakeholders may contribute to discrimination. Hence, the 3 major types of discrimination are employer discrimination, employee discrimination, and customer discrimination (Becker, 1971). Employer discrimination occurs when an employer considers a person of a specific gender for a specific job. For instance, employers prefer to have women as secretaries. Employee discrimination happens when employees are not willing to work with other employees because of their gender. One of the brightest examples illustrating this type of discrimination is that men don't like when women

have a higher position in an organizational hierarchy. Finally, customers may not want to purchase certain products or services from women (Grybaite, 2006). For instance, customers may not want to purchase cars from women.

The discrimination leads to the crowding model that was developed by Barbara Bergmann (Bergmann, 1974, p.103-110). According to this model, women are excluded from certain occupations, and therefore they are concentrated in other professions which results in higher competition among them. There are 2 major types of gender segregation, which are vertical segregation and horizontal segregation. Vertical segregation refers to men occupying higher positions in the same occupation. Horizontal segregation refers to men and women working in different occupations (Brynin, 2017). Segregation by gender results in lower wages for women, because of market crowding. Studies have found that occupational segregation can explain about 17% of the pay gap between men and women. This segregation can be also explained by gender role theory. This theory states that women and men subconsciously follow certain gender roles, because of social pressure and high expectations.

Another theory that is highly supported in the U.S. as well as in England is the undervaluation theory. According to this theory, work done by women is both socially and economically undervalued (Brynin, 2017). Considering that modern society is still influenced by patriarchy and masculinity, these factors influence people's perception of what is considered good and bad. It also influences what qualities, behaviors, and traits should be awarded higher wages. As a result, such traditional masculine behaviors as aggressive negotiation style, working continuously, and performing for longer hours are perceived as beneficial for business (Brynin, 2017). Most women don't follow masculine patterns of behavior, which reduces their ability to earn good wages. Women have to accept unnatural patterns of behavior if they want to achieve

career growth and professional development. It should also be noted that the undervaluation of women has created certain false stereotypes. For instance, it is believed that women are motivated only by basic needs and therefore they shouldn't earn as much as men (Brynin, 2017). Still, this theory is also often criticized, because pay gap varies across countries, meaning that undervaluation is not a universal occurrence. In some countries, women's labor is valued more than in others.

Apparently, different theories provide different perspectives on the problem of the gender pay gap, and all of them have strengths as well as limitations. This can be explained by the fact that the gender pay gap is a rather complex phenomenon, which is caused by numerous factors and interplay existing between them. Different researchers have tried to explore and analyze these factors.

This literature review indicates that while numerous theories are existing on why the gender pay gap occurs in different contexts, they have quite contradictory perspectives on factors contributing to it. Furthermore, scholars don't provide much information regarding the most effective methods of addressing the problem of the gender pay gap. Additionally, the views on the problem are constantly evolving because social factors and societies are in the constant process of change. Hence, it is crucial to explore the most recent literature to understand what methods work the most effective for reducing the gender pay gap in the U.S. This is the reason most sources are within the last 10 years.

Furthermore, it is also good practice to find studies that encompass a wide range of public and private sectors to show the potential recognition of the gender pay gap being empirically supported from a wide range of perspectives. Relying on a single set of statistics to identify or prove the existence of a trend as vital to economic development as the gender pay gap could lead

to bias. However, if multiple studies analyze the same data and reach similar reliable conclusions, then one can deem the trend as valid.

The conclusion gathered is that while gender-based pay was being equalized to a small extent, the economic forces are creating larger imbalances among all workers by favoring a group of largely white men with enormous wage and benefits packages while relying on highly controlled basic wages (the minimum wage remained unchanged, creating a “sticky floor” for pay scales) to control wage-based costs and increase profits. This makes the gender pay gap issue a concern for all workers because unfairness to a majority is ultimately a path of unfairness and a reality for all.

Finally, the effect of demoralizing roughly half the national workforce is a large-scale negative impact that the gender pay gap potentially creates. This is a conclusion drawn by Newman (2016), in his analysis of the potential effect of the gender pay gap can have on the perception of “The American Dream.” This largely accepted national construct creates the idea that working hard will merit equal rewards. However, Newman argues in conjunction with empirical support, that women whose salary falls short of equality are most likely to reject the implicit “promise” of the U.S. as a meritocracy, and the evidence supports that it is not. On the other hand, women whose salary has achieved equality are more likely to support the idea of “The American Dream”, using their success as self-fulfilling evidence (Newman 2016, p. 1021).

Research Questions

Based on the scholarly literature review, the following research questions were derived:

RQ1 – How did the pay inequality begin? How did it develop in the last 10 years?

RQ2 - What can be done at different levels to reduce the gender pay gap in the United States?

Considering that the research question is rather broad, it is crucial to use a methodology that will allow providing as many details as possible. Therefore, the qualitative methodology can be suggested for conducting the study as a particularly suitable method to collect experiences.

Research Methods / Data Collection

This study uses an integrative desktop literature review to answer the research questions. The integrative literature review is a qualitative research method, which focuses on reviewing literature associated with the topic of interest. The integrative literature review is different from traditional literature review because it can also include policy-related literature and practical literature that can be used to answer the research question. Scholarly literature can be used to come up with the research question (Callahan, 2014). Integrative literature review can be applied for different purposes, from studying the literature on a certain topic addressing a particular phenomenon (Callahan, 2014).

An integrative literature review consists of several important components, including need and purpose, the definition of the topic, critical analysis, synthesis, logic, and conceptual reasoning, and implications for future research. Identification of the topic is the first step. Integrative literature reviews can be used to analyze new as well as matured topics. The main goal of the integrative literature review is to explore different perspectives associated with the topic of interest and analyzing similarities as well as differences (Torraco, 2016). Further, the researcher critically reads the literature on the topic of interest and focuses on identifying strengths, shortcomings, inaccuracies, and other aspects of literature (Torraco, 2016). The areas

for possible improvements in the literature are also identified. Further, the researcher synthesizes results by creating new ideas, themes, and knowledge from the reviewed literature. The new knowledge can be used to answer the research question (Torraco, 2016). After the data analysis is conducted, implications for future research are discussed. After reconceptualizing the topic, it is possible to identify new topics in the literature as well as establish what hasn't been explored yet.

The articles used for this integrative literature review are published in the past 10 years. The research focused on analyzing the most recent publicly available data because the topic of the gender pay gap is quite saturated, however, more and more studies appear on this topic every year. Hence, it is crucial to analyze novel findings as well as inconsistencies and similarities existing in these findings and scholarly research presented in the literature review. Several search engines were used during the search process, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Glassdoor, and others.

The following keywords and phrases are used during the search process “gender pay gap”, “gender segregation” “solutions to pay gap between men and women”, “United States gender pay gap”, “gender and economic inequality”. Studies relevant to the research questions are chosen during the process of search. The researcher used only secondary sources of information, and the main focus was on opinion and descriptive articles.

Data Analysis through Integrative desktop literature review

The solutions proposed and applied in a different context to address the problem of the gender pay gap are quite diverse. Considering the complex nature of the problem, scientists, scholars, economists, and politicians have tried to address the problem differently while also

presenting the historical context of the development of the pay inequality in the gender pay gap. In general, the recommendations and potential solutions that can address the problem of the gender pay gap can be then divided into several levels. These levels are individual, employer, and government (Miller & Vagins, 2018).

Do Women Really Suffer from Pay Inequality?

It is imperative in discussing the gender pay gap to address the small but vocal minority that calls the gap “a myth.” A state-by-state study by the National Partnership for Women and Families (NPWF) (2021) of wages paid to men and women across 178 job categories where each gender has at least a 20% representation in the workforce (to avoid outlier bias) revealed the following: Nationally, the median annual pay for a woman who holds a full-time, year-round job is \$47,299 while the median annual pay for a man who holds a full-time, year-round job is \$57,456. This means that, overall, women in the United States are paid 82 cents for every dollar paid to men, amounting to an annual gender pay gap of \$10,157 (NPWF, 2021 emphasis in the original).

Using essentially the same state-by-state data but adjusted for regional wage variations and race/ethnic group, the pay gap is even more prevalent, with Asian women at 90% of white men’s average wages, white women at 79%, Black women at 62%, Native American women at 57%, and Hispanic/Latino women at 52% (Bleiweis, 2020). If one looks at age-based differences, the gender pay gap is less, but still there. According to a longitudinal study at Pew Research Center, for women aged 16+ in the workforce, the gender pay gap is about 85%, while for the age 25-34 group, the gap is 89% (Graf, Brown & Patton, 2019). These two figures are slightly better than the overall 82% noted by the NPWF and Bleiweis, but the data reveals two hidden negatives. The first is that for women aged 25-34, the gender pay gap has actually

increased steadily since 2010. The second is that the bulk of the narrowing seen in the gender pay gap since 2012 has been because men's wages have dropped faster than women's wages (Gould, Scheider & Geiss, 2016; NPWF, 2020).

The historical argument that women earned less than men was because they were less prepared academically (product of limiting admissions of women to colleges and universities), began to lose relevance in the 1970s and 1980s, and became doubtful in the 1990s as women began earning college degrees at a higher rate than men. Since 1996, women have annually earned more basic and advanced degrees overall, and with a few exceptions (engineering, architecture, various sciences) have completed more degrees than men by as much as a 4-to-1 ratio (American Association of University Women 2018). Thus far, despite this often-overwhelming advance in college education, the gender pay gap for these women has only dropped by about 7% since 1989 (AAUW, 2018).

One factor that extensively skews the gender pay gap is executive level pay. As a miniature picture of this impact, one needs only to look at the fact that there are only 37 female CEOs in all of the Fortune 500. Contrast this rate of being barely above 7% with the fact that in the Fortune 500 companies, 50.8% of all workers are women (National Partnership 2021). A closer look at the data will show that for companies with at least 10,000 employees, only 19.4% of the top executive positions are held by women, even in fields where women make up over 80% of the workforce, such as nursing and teaching (AAUW 2018).

Lastly, to address the deniers of the gender pay gap, who claim that women *choose* lower-paying careers (as if it is the woman's fault her options are reduced by the male gatekeepers), work fewer hours overall due to maternity leave, and lack the aggressiveness to ask for raises or better benefits, the data proves them wrong. Adjusted by specific jobs, women still

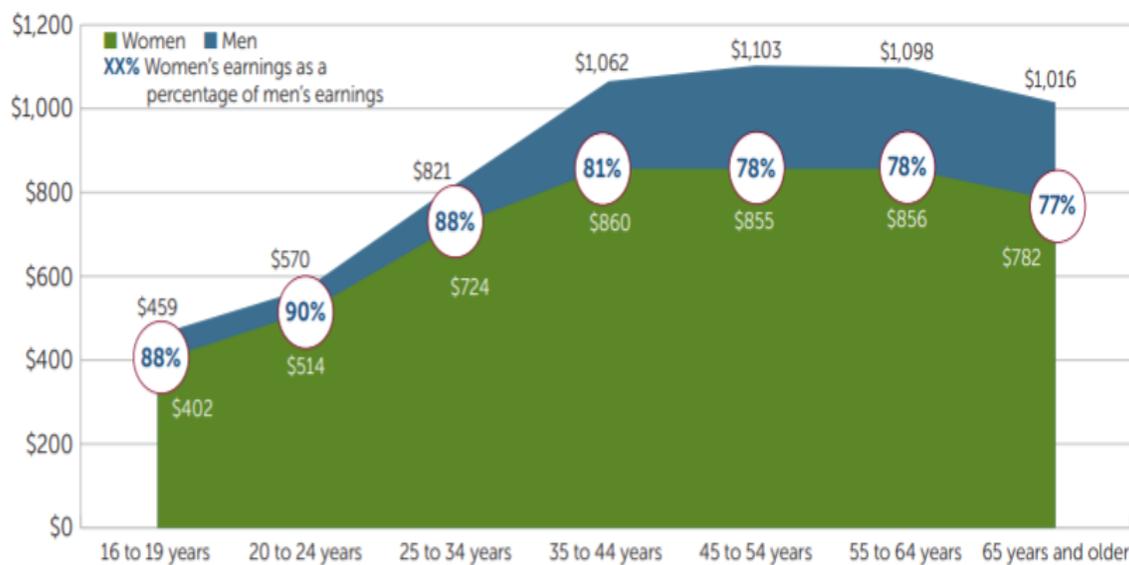
earn from 51% to 87% of what men earn across over 160 job categories (Gould, Scheider & Geier, 2016); on average work 110 more hours a year than men even taking into account maternity leave, and women are turned down for raises and benefit expansions almost three times more often than men in similar jobs (AAUW, 2018; NPWF, 2021). The gender pay gap is real, and its roots are deep.

Why Do Women Suffer Pay Inequality?

As World War I crushed the male populations of several European countries, women began entering the workforce in greater numbers in order to turn out the goods and services that male workers used to do. Data from the times shows that productivity was higher with more women workers, although wages for women are slightly lower (Kessler-Harris, 2014, p. 41-42). When the war ended, policies and pressure from men reversed many of the worker gains made by women. This was altered radically by World War II, when once again women entered the workforce in massive numbers, but this time the gains are energetically defended by women against male bias (Kessler-Harris, 2014, p. 51).

Studies focused on European Union emphasize that such factors as gender discrimination across industries as well as hours of work are the major factors contributing to the gender pay gap existing in the region (Boll, 2016). Factors as age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability status, level of education, and others are also found to be significantly associated with the gender pay gap. As for the U.S., the gender earnings ratio in this country is 80%. In other words, the gender pay gap between men and women is 20% (Miller & Vagins, 2018). It also varies significantly across states, so in Louisiana, the gender pay gap is 31% while in California it is 11%.

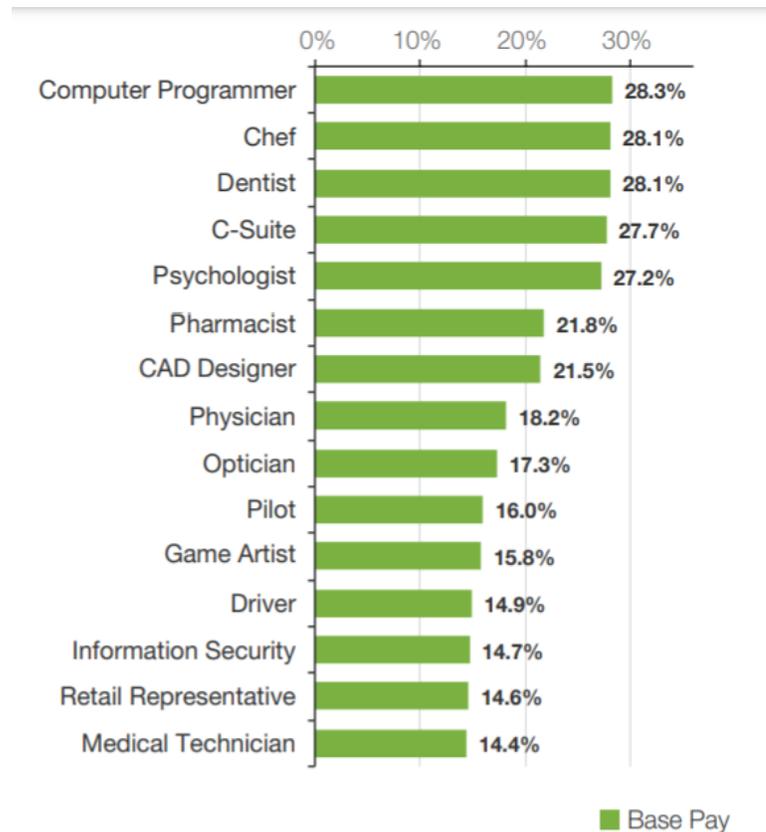
It is also important to note that the gender pay gap can be especially obvious in ethnic minority groups (Miller & Vagins, 2018; Boll, 2016). Considering that ethnic minorities also experience social pressure and discrimination and earn on average significantly less compared to the general population, the gender pay gap can affect women belonging to ethnic minorities even stronger. It is interesting that the highest gender pay gap in the U.S. exists in the Asian group and equals 22%. At the same time, Asians tend to have higher median earnings compared to other ethnic groups (Miller & Vagins, 2018). A similar situation is observed in the White non-Hispanic population. People belonging to it also tend to earn more compared to other ethnic groups, however, the gender pay gap is also 22%. As for age, the gender pay gap is also constantly changing depending on the age group. For instance, the gender pay gap in the 16 to 19 years age group is only 12% while in the 65+ age group the gap is 23%. (Fig. 1)



(Fig. 1 Median weekly earnings by gender and age (the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018))

In certain occupations, the gender pay gap is traditionally high compared to other occupations. Professions associated with the IT industry, healthcare, game development, and

some others are traditionally dominated by men (Fig 2). Changing the status quo in these professions can be extremely difficult. Still, certain professions are associated with men in the past, are now perfectly handled by women. Social stereotypes are gradually changing, and even now certain IT companies are implementing policies for attracting more women in the industry.



(Fig. 2 Top 15 U.S. Occupations by “Adjusted” Gender Pay Gap (Percentage Higher Average Male Pay (Chamberlain, 2016)

Another important factor that shouldn't be ignored is either a woman has children or not. Employers are less likely to hire women who have children, compared to those without children. Furthermore, women with children are paid less compared to women who don't have children (Miller & Vagins, 2018). The factors mentioned above emphasize the complexity of the gender

pay gap problem and the need of developing complex solutions to address it. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand that there are thousands of other smaller factors, which often remain barely noticeable. The focus on what factors contribute to the gender pay gap is constantly changing. Scholars constantly find more and more factors that can explain pay inequalities existing between men and women (Rubery & Grimshaw, 2015). The modern environment is highly chaotic and is changing extremely rapidly, therefore more and more factors contributing to the gender pay gap as well as more and more strategies focused on addressing these factors are emerging.

U.S. legislation mandated the elimination of unfair labor practices with the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, but gender-based discrimination remained legal until the Equal Pay Act of 1963. While it barred employers from paying male and female workers different wages, the definition was vague, stating that said discrimination applied to “jobs the performance of which requires equal skill, effort, and responsibility, and which are performed under similar working conditions” (Daugherty, 2021). But the Act allowed for exceptions based on seniority or merit, loopholes that are exploited in a wide variety of ways (Bishu & Alkadry, 2017).

One such exception was occupational segregation, a systematic channeling of men and women into certain careers. A young man with scientific brain might be encouraged to be a doctor, while a woman with similar traits would be directed to pursue nursing. In this manner, “merit” was allocated by gender. The use of “merit” as a guideline could be exploited against women in many ways. For example, entry-level jobs that could fast-track a career are often denied to women because of the idea that they would (at some point) take maternity leave, maybe more than once. By making “consistency of performance” a form of “merit,” women could be barred from such occupations (Mandel & Semyonov, 2014, p. 1605).

In fact, the “motherhood penalty” is a statistically significant factor in the gender pay gap, as it costs women about 5% on average in career earnings for every child (Graf, Brown & Patton, 2019). This gap is in addition to the gender pay gap because men do not suffer the same decline even adjusting for hours worked and seniority.

Alkadry & Tower (2011) noted that the gender pay gap had an additional, unnoticed factor concerning authority. Women are consistently being denied levels of authority that corresponded with faster career growing paths and ultimately higher earnings. Under the pretence of redefining authority and keeping women from using it in the same way as men, pay discrimination could continue unabated (Alkadry & Tower, 2011).

Ultimately, the factors for women having to deal with a gender-based pay gap drill down to a simple fact: the system demands it. Whether one places the blame at the feet of capitalism for its profit-at-all-costs mentality, the socio-political system that requires women maintain a submissive and nurturing role inside the home, or the patriarchy applying its will for power over women, the pay gap is a systematic problem with multiple roots and causes. This does not justify the practice, for it hurts everyone, not just women.

How Does Pay Inequality Hurt the U.S.?

At the abstract level, no society can claim to be just and fair in equality when a majority of its workers are systematically underpaid solely because of their gender. The problem is worse because the gender pay gap is also worsened by race and ethnicity (Bleiweis, 2020). At the practical level, the impact of the gender pay gap is a reflection of a much deeper and troubling problem.

Blau and Kahn (1994) are among the first researchers to observe that while the gender pay gap was narrowing, pay inequality was rising. Data indicated that the small gains made by women for pay parity are largely undermined by the growing distance between executive-level pay and average worker compensation (Blau & Kahn, 1994, p. 25). The gender pay gap was also projected to flatten due to neglect of systematic factors addressed in current policy (Blau & Kahn, 1994); a conclusion verified later (see AAUW, 2018;, Graf, Brown & Patton, 2019;NPWF, 2021).

If women are denied the power to achieve higher earnings (Alkadry & Tower 2011) and pay inequality has become an embedded and increasing reality (Graf, Brown & Patton, 2019; NPWF, 2021), what does this do to the average worker's motivation? Newman (2016) argues that that belief in "The American Dream" was significantly less in women who are victims of the gender pay gap. It is evident that being underpaid is a significant de-motivator, not just for women, but for anyone.

What does it say about the prospects for national economic growth when the majority of workers in that country are systematically underpaid and thus disincentivized to perform at their best? Besides, as noted by the NPWF (2021), with so many women-led households in the U.S., the national economy and the society that contextualizes it best served by systematically limiting the potential productivity and contributions of millions of working women? The answers to these questions may seem obvious, but their difficulty can best be understood through practical examples.

Why Everyone Should Understand Pay Inequality

Three reasons are fundamental to defining why everyone should understand pay inequality. The first, as noted by Blau & Kahn (1994), is that the gender pay gap contributes to overall pay inequality. It is essentially an application of supply and demand, for if there is a lower-cost alternative to an expense, that option will be selected more often and thus bring the overall price down. By having a gender pay gap, all wages are affected negatively.

The second is that the push by the system to reduce wages for everyone led to the undermining and eventually eliminating unions. Labor unions are instrumental in developing key aspects of the modern work environment, such as eight-hour days, overtime pay, and many of the “standard” benefits. Unions are often supported by and aimed at female workers due to the lower standards they often faced, from wages to working conditions (Kessler-Harris, 2014, p. 29). Unions are able to create a higher standard of living for all workers, and the reduction of union-based protection is directly correlated with pay inequality and overall economic inequality in the U.S. (Blau & Kahn, 1994; National Partnership 2021). Although women’s wages have dropped as union protection was eliminated, the biggest drop is among men’s wages, a trend already in place before 1994 (Blau & Kahn, 1994), and worse in 2021 (National Partnership, 2021).

The final reason is that pay inequality is a clear sign of a dysfunctional economic system. Blau & Kahn’s analysis in 1994 was based on a federal minimum pay scale of \$4.25, while the 2021 figure is still locked at an \$7.25. This creates what is called a “sticky floor” where wages cannot rise because the options are restricted: a person in a full-time minimum wage job cannot raise a family and must often find a second or even third job to make ends meet (National Partnership 2021). Most of the workers trapped in such a position are women which undermines the larger potential of economic growth for everyone, as human capital is mistreated or wasted to serve corporate and/or political agendas.

Practical Implications

Individual-Level Solutions

The research also provides several important recommendations that can work at an individual level. Firstly, women are recommended to negotiate their salary. This will allow women to have higher salaries and increase their median income. The ability to negotiate can be promoted through workshops and courses focused on improving the self-confidence of women (Miller & Vagins, 2018). Furthermore, individuals can become agents of positive social change by promoting and accelerating the extermination of social injustices and inequalities. Women's rights movements, social media activism, and other methods can increase public awareness of this problem. People will develop a clear understanding that the problem of the gender pay gap should be address as soon as possible. Women should take part in protests and initiate public debates on the topic of the gender pay gap (Miller & Vagins, 2018). The historical examples indicate that women's activism was one of the major factors that helped women in getting more rights. Such organizations as the American Association of University Women (AAUW) and others are created to empower women and challenge the status quo by eliminating social injustices (Miller & Vagins, 2018). Therefore, active women should become members of such organizations, and take part in activities associated with women's rights activism.

One of the examples illustrating the effectiveness of public awareness campaign is a five-year-long public campaign in New Zealand focused on reducing the gender pay gap among care workers (Milner et al., 2019). The results of the campaign are quite impressive and the pay for women has increased by 15-50%. In addition to that, the campaign had long-lasting effects on empowering women.

Employer-Level Solutions

Employers should understand that equal pay is important for organizational performance. Such factors as perceived justice existing in an organization and perceived fairness of wages paid by the organization are directly related to employees' motivation. Therefore, every organization should be interested in reducing the gender pay gap. Organizations can be recommended to take various steps to reduce this gap. One of the potential solutions that can be applied by employers is regular pay audits, which would assess differences in wages across employees belonging to different social and gender groups (Miller & Vagins, 2018). There are many examples of companies that have already implemented payment audits and achieved quite impressive results. For instance, Salesforce company has performed a payment audit in 2015, which resulted in salary adjustments of women and contributed to the promotion of women working in this company (Miller & Vagins, 2018). This company became quite popular in the U.S. and its case was discussed by different researchers. Many companies in the U.S. have already implemented payment audits and have joined the Employers for Pay Equity Consortium hosted by Simons College (Miller & Vagins, 2018) Organizations should understand that women in leadership positions contribute to higher returns of investments (ROI). The ROI of companies where women have positions in the higher managerial hierarchy is 10% higher (Troiano, 2015). By eradicating barriers preventing women from progressing in the organizational hierarchy it is possible to improve organizational performance significantly. This is because more diverse groups tend to provide better solutions, because of having different perspectives (Troiano, 2015; Milner et al., 2019). Hence, organizations can use gender quotas, to ensure that there will be at least several women working in managerial positions.

While payment audits can be rather effective, they may require additional resources, and it is important to consider some other solutions, that can be even more simple. One of the potential low-cost strategies that can be used by employers is prohibiting retaliation for wage disclosure (Miller & Vagins, 2018). Employees are not even aware sometimes regarding wage disparities because of such policies. It is needed to increase transparency and public and private sector, to initiate the discussion on wage disparity existing between men and women. Another recommendation that employers should consider is not to pay attention to salary history. Unfortunately, employers are still analyzing the salary history while determining the wage of their employees (Miller & Vagins, 2018). It can be recommended for employers to use market research to identify fair wages. Transparency to promotion pay and reward process is another important strategy for addressing inequality at the workplace. Organizations should provide employees with a clearly specified set of criteria and goals which employees should achieve to be promoted (Government Equalities Office, 2017).

Work-life policies can be considered as another effective option for reducing the gender pay gap within organizations. Such policies focus on helping employees to combine their family life and work. Considering that women are highly involved in family life, and perform various family-related functions, such policies can reduce pressure experienced by women and positively contribute to their work-related performance, which in turn will contribute to higher wages (Van der Lippe et al., 2019). Family-supportive organizational culture is one of the factors which makes organizations friendlier to people of both genders. Parental leave, part-time work, and other policies are crucial for reducing the gender pay gap (Van der Lippe et al., 2019).

Analyzing the examples of companies that have already implemented effective policies targeting the gender pay gap, can provide valuable insights into the most effective strategies that

can be used to address the problem. One of such companies is Swedbank, which is one of the largest financial institutions in Sweden (WEPS, 2017). The bank has developed a plan to ensure that all employees will be paid equally. One of the main challenges was to create a system allowing to compare roles of people and measuring equal pay. The organization has developed a detailed definition of every job, as well as guidelines on how to evaluate the performance of employees working at these jobs (WEPS, 2017). The researchers note that one of the largest challenges was to make managers understand the importance of reducing the gender pay gap. So, the process began from a transformation of organizational climate and organizational culture. After all, managers are aware of the importance of the reduction of the gender pay gap, the process of change was initiated. The performance of every employee was evaluated based on objective measures and not on subjective perceptions. The need to use objective standardized measures is also emphasized by Government Equalities Office (2017). It is recommended for providing each employee with the same standardized questions, to avoid biased attitudes. Structured interviews can be used for this purpose, and answers to the interview questions should be assessed by using pre-specified standardized criteria (Government Equalities Office, 2017). HR managers are trained on how to avoid gender-related biases and assess the performance of each employee effectively. As a result, the company was able to reduce the gender pay gap to 0.4%. WEPS (2017) emphasizing the importance of a highly motivated leadership team that would initiate the process of change. The company has also developed measurement instruments to track progress. Further, Swedbank was constantly reporting its progress to the public, which improved the image of the company, and made it more popular. Still, it should be noted that Swedbank had enough resources to eliminate the gender pay gap. Frequently, organizations don't

have enough resources to initiate the process of change and may not be motivated to reduce the gender pay gap due to financial costs associated with this initiative.

Another successful example of how the gender pay gap can be reduced at the employer level in Cisco company. The company had developed a strategy called “Our People Deal”, which focused on supporting employees and creating a comfortable working environment. Cisco has developed a new analytical approach focused on identifying either all employees are paid equally or not (Murphy & Zheng, 2016). The company focused on identifying root causes and factors influencing pay equality. A proactive monitoring strategy was also implemented; therefore, the company was able to track progress effectively and identify various issues as soon as they appeared (Murphy & Zheng, 2016)

The solutions mentioned above share similar features and characteristics. They are all focused on contributing to justice and fairness. Their main goal is to ensure that people are treated equally in a work environment. Of course, some organizations are implementing the policies because of external pressures associated with legislation, however, in some cases, these policies are implemented voluntarily, because of shifts in social opinion regarding equality issues. It is crucial to understand that in capitalistic environment employers are driven by the desire to earn as much money as possible, therefore policies focused on the gender pay gap should also increase profits of an organization as well as organizational performance, otherwise they won't be implemented effectively (WEPS, 2017). Increasing awareness among employers regarding the importance of reduction of the gender pay gap to increase profits of an organization is crucial for promoting positive organizational changes.

Government-Level Solutions

Government-level solutions refer to actions and policies associated with the government focused on resolving the problem of the gender pay gap. Different countries have tried to implement different solutions to this problem. The U.S. as one of the most developed countries and one of the leading global advocates on equality between men and women has implemented various initiatives focused on solving this problem. The U.S. government has created numerous organizations addressing women's labor issues, such as the Women in Industry Service and Labor Women's Bureau (Miller & Vagins, 2018). Certain acts and laws contributing to equal wages are also enacted, including The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), The Women's Equality Bill, The Equal Pay Act, and many others. While governments of different countries declare that women shouldn't be discriminated against and should be paid equally to men, the problem still exists. For now, the U.S. government should enact the Pay Equity for All Act, which prohibits employers from using salary history. The national system of paid parental leave should also be suggested (Miller & Vagins, 2018).

As for methods used by governments of other developed countries to address the problem, there are plenty of them, The European Union has obligations to eliminate the gender pay gap stated in Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome (Smoder & Miroslaw, 2016). Several EU members states have implemented action plans for reducing the gender pay gap. In Austria, Finland, France, Italy, Belgium, Sweden, and Norway, employers are required to monitor the level of compensation and create reports on the gender pay gap (Smoder & Miroslaw, 2016). Legislation in Belgium obliges employers to present information regarding differences in pay. If a gender pay gap exists in a certain organization, this organization should develop an action plan to address the problem (Smoder & Miroslaw, 2016). The EU is also increasing public awareness regarding the problem. It has established the Equal Pay Day, which is organized every year.

Depending on whether or not the gender pay gap is increasing or decreasing the date when this day is organized changes. Another important thing to mention is that most organizations don't allow employees to disclose their information regarding salaries. This approach also contributes to the gender pay gap, and some countries have enacted laws allowing employees to disclose information on their wages freely. Such legislation exists in California (ILO, 2016).

In general, the creation of reports on the gender pay gap is one of the most widespread strategies to address the problem in the EU. The development of action plans for reducing the gender pay gap is also quite widespread. In general, companies in the EU are required to create reports once in several years, and some companies are not even required to do it, especially if they don't have many employees (Smoder & Miroslaw, 2016). In some cases, reports are checked by certain monitoring bodies and in some cases, they can even be published (ILO, 2016). These reports can also be delivered to workers' representatives. In Quebec trade unions together with employers create pay equity plans by creating a pay equity committee. At least half of the representatives of a pay equity committee must be women (ILO, 2016). However, such practices are not widespread in most countries. While the publication of reports is the first step, there is usually no second step taken to address the gender pay gap. Employers may find different ways of imitating struggle with inequality; however, they may never achieve any positive results.

Though the effectiveness of reports is quite doubtful, at least they can be used to increase public awareness and improve the collection of data associated with the problem, which can contribute to the development of more effective solutions and strategies. The idea that EU legislation is not quite effective for addressing the problem is supported by many researchers,

including O'Reilly et al., (2015). It is believed that the evolution of EU policy approaches focused on equal pay has gone full circle.

It is also needed to understand that legislation that targets inequality in wages shouldn't focus on employers only (O'Reilly et al., 2015). The gender pay gap is an extremely complex trend, therefore legislation should address its different aspects. Instead of implementing legal measures focused on stimulating employers to reduce the gender pay gap, governments should focus on targeting inequality existing between people in general. For instance, governments should focus on providing people with equal opportunities to receive high-quality education (O'Reilly et al., 2015).

Discussion on Contributions to prior research

The gender pay gap is real, and its effect on women is not an isolated outcome in the larger national context. It cannot be because women in the U.S. make up a majority of the workforce, and while that majority is slight, it still represents over half of all workers. A system that essentially cheats half its workers is patently unfair, but it goes further to cheat a majority of men who are underpaid as well because the policies that underpay women also help keep their wages low (union-busting, for example). Until and unless the larger systematic problem of economic inequality is addressed in the U.S., the economic potential of the country will be increasingly jeopardized by an unfair construct that will eventually become a more open battlefield.

How to Reduce Pay Inequality

Reducing the gender pay gap, as important as it is, takes secondary place to reducing overall economic inequality in the U.S. In the 1960s, CEO pay averaged 27 times the average

worker's pay, and a full-time minimum wage job was enough to rent a two-bedroom apartment and feed a family of four. By 2020, the average CEO's pay was 337 times that of the average worker, and a full-time minimum wage job could not rent a one-bedroom apartment anywhere in the U.S. (Kessler-Harris 2014, p. 159-161; National Partnership 2021). Closing the gender pay gap only addresses part of the problem.

First, the federal minimum wage must be raised. If it is to match economic reality as it did in the 1950s and 1960s, the minimum wage would be at least \$22.50 (AAUW 2018). The current push for \$15 an hour is a step in the right direction which could immediately help over 38 million workers, with about 22 million of those workers being women (National Partnership 2021). Second, policies need to be enacted to stop corporate and public entities from defining jobs in vague "merit" terms and expose male-dominated gatekeeping for what it is: rank discrimination.

Third, laws protecting corporations against unions should be rewritten to seriously penalize those who oppose unionization through tactics such as threats, unfair dismissals, and illegal surveillance. Finally, the gender pay gap and economic inequality are products of ideologies that have been tilted in favor of those who want gains from those who do the actual work. These gains are economic, political, and social, and addressing those roots will do more to reverse the trend than current marginal policies do.

The reviewed studies indicate that there is no best way to address the problem of the gender pay gap. The idea that complex solutions should be applied to solve the problem of the gender pay gap is supported by many researchers (Milner et al., 2019). There can be different conceptualizations applied to identify, and categorize solutions to the gender pay gap, however in most cases gender pay gap solutions are performed at 3 major levels, which are individual,

employer, and governmental. There is a reciprocal relationship existing between solutions and strategies implemented at each level. The gender pay gap solutions model is provided in Fig. 3. Hence, changes should be promoted at each level.



(Fig. 3 Gender Pay Gap solutions)

The integrative literature review has identified several important mechanisms through which the gender pay gap can be eliminated, or at least diminished. Firstly, the change process should always be initiated through a transformation of culture. Social culture can be transformed by increasing public awareness regarding certain issues and making people accept certain values. When a social culture develops a new norm, it starts to spread and become accepted by more and more people. The most developed countries are more flexible in changing their culture, which provides the U.S. significant advantages. At the employer level, changes in culture are also required to reduce the gender pay gap. Every change in organizational environment and culture is highly stressful for employees, even if a change contributes to something positive. Therefore, it is needed to create a strong leadership team that would initiate and drive the process of change. Managers should be explained why reducing the gender gap is beneficial for the company. After

that, the process of change can be initiated. The leadership team will spread new organizational culture values among employees, which will result in the gradual transformation of organizational culture (WEPS, 2017). Once the new organizational culture is developed and accepted, the main task of employees is to maintain it, which can be achieved by applying regular payment audits.

In general, organizations should use 2 approaches to address the problem of the gender pay gap. These approaches are detection and prevention. Pay audits refer to detection methods, while changes in the hiring process, better pay transparency, removal of a glass ceiling, and creation of a more flexible and effective work culture are preventive strategies (Murphy & Zheng, 2016). In many cases discrimination is unintentional and happens subconsciously, therefore organizations should develop awareness by using detection strategies.

As for government-level solutions, they don't seem to work quite effectively. More than 50 years have passed since the U.S. government has enacted The Equal Pay Act, still, there is a significant pay gap existing across various groups. The problem is that government doesn't have enough leverages of pressure to influence organizations. There are no effective legislative mechanisms that would control how organizations are fighting inequality and the gender pay gap. Still, the government may use certain stimulative measures such as obliging organizations to publish reports on gender pay gaps as well as to provide action plans on how to resolve these issues. Hence, the government can also contribute to changes in organizational and social culture. As it was mentioned, there is a reciprocal relationship between solutions implemented at different levels.

It should be noted that only a few countries have implemented legislation allowing employees to disclose information about their salaries. Furthermore, only a few countries have

governmental bodies with real power to influence companies to reduce the gender pay gap.

While governments are declaring that they are doing everything to contribute to equality and eliminate social injustices, the effectiveness of their policies is quite doubtful.

Based on my professional and academic career obtaining both a bachelor's and master's degree in Corporate Communication, I feel that it is acceptable to give my opinion on the topic considering the research and experience I've accumulated. The best chance of eliminating the pay inequality and gender pay gap is through internal communications because whether or not you learn about equality through school or at home, everyone will work at one point of their lives. Hopefully at that time you are able to be made aware and understand that keeping that job is very important and being able to communicate effectively and with empathy for others will make you a better employee and consequently a better person. Treating your peers in the workplace with respect and dignity can be a sign of how you handle clients and potential customers. As an employer it says a lot about your organization when you have employees that want what's best for everyone instead of themselves. The first way that can be effective is for employers to set standards of inclusivity within the internal communications and employee communications. I believe that it is easier to eliminate the discrimination and inequality in the workplace first which will eventually span out externally to the individuals and in the government sectors. Second, on the individual level we must shift the vocabulary to be non-gender binding within occupations, and in general conversations we must be cautious to not participate in gender discrimination. Continuing through the government which are essentially legal business should follow the steps mentioned already in conjunction with employers.

In conclusion, future studies should address several important gaps focused on the gender pay gap existing in the U.S. Such as research including or attempting to interview and find data

regarding the LGBTQ2+ community and those affected such as transgenders, non-binary, etc. Due to the fact that this academic research was conducted analyzing only male and female genders. Studies should also focus on the gender pay gap in the online environment, where people are chosen not because of their gender but because of the skills they have. Furthermore, studies should allow assessing either gender pay gap is influenced predominantly by biases and cultural factors, or if it is more influence by human capital factors, such as skills and knowledge of an individual. Moreover, studies should focus on identifying leadership styles that work the most effectively in promoting changes in an organizational culture focused on reducing the gender pay gap. Finally, more studies should be conducted on individual-level solutions. There is a lack of studies exploring strategies that can be used by women at the individual level to have higher wages and reduce the gender pay gap. By filling all the gaps mentioned earlier in the scholarly literature, it will be possible to develop a better understanding of what should be done in the nearest future to reduce the gender pay gap in the U.S.

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